against sectarianism

the challenge of the labor party

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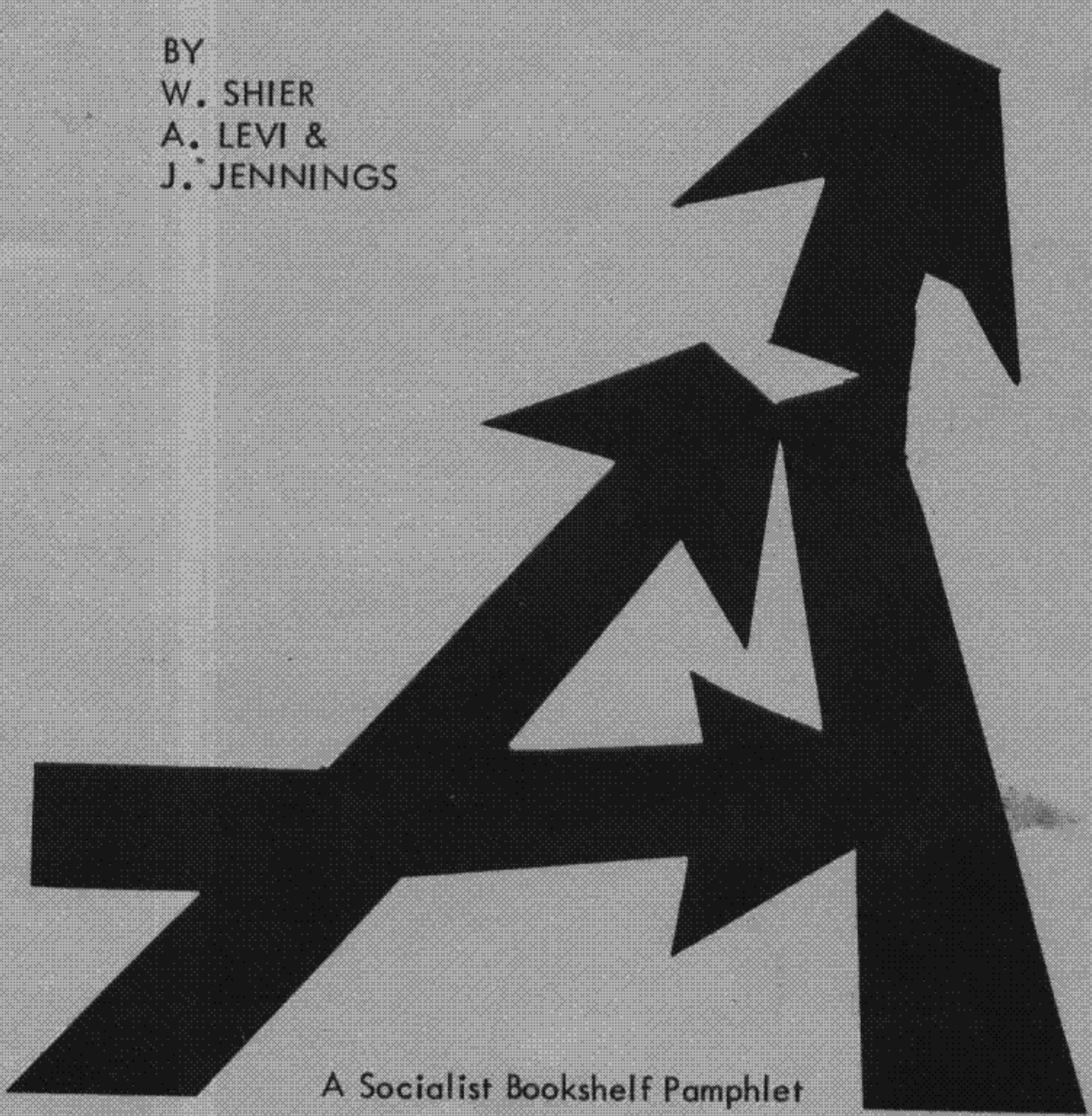

A Socialist Bookshelf Pamphlet

Against Sectarianism: the challenge of the labor party

By W. Shier, A. Levi & J. Jennings* *(the viewpoint of three leading members of the newly-formed Socialist League after the break from the League for Socialist Action in March 1974 -ed. *pseudonyms for Wayne R., Abie W. & Jim M. -ed.)*

(Preface)

This is a contribution about the key question facing socialists in Canada today - the NDP, Canada's labor party. The work is addressed to those who see the need for a total restructuring of society through revolutionary change, and who know the necessity for a correct strategy to bring that about. It is published as a contribution to the ongoing discussion in the left. The authors are associated with the Socialist League *(known as the Forward Group from 1977)*

(Quotation sources referred to by numbers in the text will be found at the end of the text.)

AGAINST SECTARIANISM

Since the 1870's, when the working class of Canada began to take shape as a class, with its own concepts, recognizing its separate identity and Interests, the question of independent labor political action has been the key question confronting the workers' movement. This world wide development of the 19th century was greeted with enthusiasm by Marx and Engels, especially in England and America, as opening the door to rising class consciousness and socialism. Certainly in Canada independent labor political action rapidly became pivotal to socialists in their intervention in the labor movement.

The organizations created in this period, in Canada and throughout the world, proved unable to stand up to the acid tests of proletarian internationalism and loyalty to the class struggle during World War I and after. Faced with the betrayals and inadequacies of these leaderships and organizations the most politically advanced workers throughout the world identified with the call of Lenin for the Third International. The twenty-one points of the Third International drew a chasm between the Communist and Social Democratic leaderships and organizations of the working class.

However, partially due to problems of leadership and partially due to the immaturity of the political class consciousness of the working masses, revolutionary communists failed to establish and consolidate their relationship with these masses in many countries. It was to the problems created by this chasm, not between the Communists and the Social Democrats but between the Communists and workers, that Lenin turned his

attention in his still instruc tive *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder.* Never one to adopt a posture of "Workers of the world, give me a call," Lenin urged strenuous activity to regain the ear of the masses who had not broken from their reformist leaderships. In certain situations, he even urged a united front with these organizations so that the Communists could go through this experience with their class.

This problem of isolation was intensified in the world wide depression of the 30's because of the degeneration of Stalinism. This found its most abominable expression in the period of the rise of Hitler when the Communist Party was enthusiastic about the prospects of "after Hitler, us" and treated the social democrats and especially left social democrats as social fascists, more dangerous than the fascists themselves.

It was the Social Democratic parties and not the Communist parties which went through the most ferment as a result of the biggest defeat of the workers movement in history. It was they who began to question most earnestly and urgently the reformist policies of their leadership. In the face of the possibilities opened up by this ferment, Trotsky proposed a "turn" on the part of French comrades, to overcome their isolation from the class, and to go through an experience in which they could increase their influence and win a part of the class away from reformism. This became a model known as the "French turn". In the US too J.P. Cannon realized that, as he put it, the mountain would not come to Mohammed, and he helped turn the small forces of American Trotskyism into the Socialist Party. They later emerged with sufficient force to play a greater role in the American class struggle. Such was the isolation of revolutionary socialists from the class, that they realised that not even a united front with the main class organizations was a possibility. To appeal for Unity you must have something to offer. They had to adopt tactics of entry.

The upsurges following the Second World War did not solve the problem. Revolutionists were still unable to gain even a toehold in the class despite repeated betrayals by the leaderships, of the workers' aspirations and even their actions. This was a crisis for the Trotskyist movement. Since the workers had not by-passed their established leaderships, even in struggles as great as these, how were revolutionists to gain influence? Two strategies were adopted - the strategy of entry *sui generis ("of a special kind" leading up to Pablo's 1950s European-based drive towards broad liquidation -ed.)*, followed by the European sections, and *(versus an alternative we pioneered -- Web Ed.)* the strategy of fraction work with a non-split perspective carried out by the Canadian Trotskyists. We did not give up the perspective of winning the workers to the building of a revolutionary Leninist party. We did not substitute for this a policy of pushing along and winning the leadership of the traditional organizations. But we realised that the hold of these organizations on the class was real and reflected the lack of experience of Canadian workers with class struggle politics.

The essentials of these problems face all revolutionists today. They persist despite the wave of the youth radicalization.

This is the key problem facing revolutionists today – how to gather the forces for the future mass revolutionary party, and how to extend the influence of their revolutionary program for the class struggle in face of the fact that the overwhelming majority of workers in advanced capitalist countries like Canada have as yet to break in the most elementary way from the hegemony of pure capitalist politics or to break from the reformist parties in the workers movement. Is there a shortcut to this process by not working in the traditional organizations of the class? This approach sounds like the political equivalent to the remedy Lenin used to talk of – the special powder that would kill a fly, as soon as it was put on the fly's wings. The problem however – is how to catch the fly.

This presentation is about this problem. How can revolutionary socialists in Canada win hegemony for their revolutionary views and organization in face of the fact that the NDP has the undisputed following of the advanced workers of Canada. Does an orientation to the NDP mean abandonment of revolutionary for reformist politics, or does it involve a transitional strategy oriented to winning leadership of the class through struggles that take place in the mainstream organizations of the class? Can the latter be done? For those interested in more than holding lecture classes for workers – does an orientation to the NDP develop or prohibit a positive relationship with rank and file workers in extra-parliamentary action? Can this relationship be established? What formulations, tactics and perspectives will best help us in that process?

The authors of this work agree with the formulation in the 1970 document of the League for Socialist Action (LSA) *The Socialist Vanguard and the NDP*, which says the "NDP is the touchstone of class politics. All working class politics revolve around it and an incorrect position on it is fatal."

In the course of years of experience in the CCF *(the farmer-labor Cooperative Commonwealth Federation founded in 1933 and superseded by the labor party, the New Democratic Party in 1961*), and a decade in the NDP, Canadian Trotskyists developed a number of guiding formulations to direct their work. These are: ‘’Unconditional and Critical Support of the NDP,’’ ‘’Fraction Work with a Non-split Perspective,’’ and working with left formations in the struggle to ‘’Win the NDP to Socialism.’’ These formulations are a valuable heritage and are an essential part of the foundation for our work in the NDP.

UNCONDITIONAL AND CRITICAL SUPPORT

This is a dialectical construct of our relationship to the NDP in this whole period of the revolutionary process in Canada. The NDP is an expression -- of independent labor politics, an expression of the elementary advancing consciousness of the workers. Because of this, and in the absence of any other *(mass -ed.)* vehicle *(other than the degenerated and atrophied Stalinist CPC -ed.* which gives political expression to this class consciousness, as revolutionists we support the NDP. We attach no conditions to its leadership or program in return for our support. Because we do not barter over the conditions of our support, we assume full rights to criticize both the leadership and the program of the NDP.

It is essential to be aware of the dual character of the NDP. On the one hand its primary significance lies in the fact that it is a labor party, and thus we support it. On the other hand its leadership and program do not meet the needs of its class character, Many radicals reject this view of the NDP and argue that it is simply a bourgeois party. In this they might think they are in honorable company. Speaking to the second congress of the Communist International, Lenin argued against a delegate from Britain; "Comrade MacLean was guilty of a slight inaccuracy with which it is impossible to agree. He calls the Labour Party the political organization of the trade union movement⋯. Of course, for the most part, the Labour Party consists of workers, but it does not logically follow from this that every workers' party which consists of workers is at the same time a 'political workers' party,' that depends upon who leads it, upon the contents of its activities and of its political tactics. Only the latter determines whether it is really a political proletarian party. From this point of view, which is the only correct point of view, the Labour Party is not a political workers' party but a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although it consists of workers, it is lead by reactionaries..." (I)

In this sharp and exact sense, the same sense that led Lenin to refer to the Soviet Union as a bourgeois state, in the course of discussing its dual nature (10), it is of course not incorrect to define the NDP as a bourgeois party.

The question is whether, as an all-encompassing definition, this designation locates the NDP among the configurations of class relations - or whether it is a useful category that turns into a categorical imperative. If our analysis of the NDP is to be rigorous, we must appreciate its dual character. We must direct ourselves to the social and historical circumstances in which the NDP is

situated. We must reject the search for any "all encompassing" term - any formalistic explanation. Dialectical materialists seek their exactitude in the concrete.

This question of labels is an important one and has been discussed many times in the Trotskyist movement. Peter Miller, a British comrade, wrote in defence of his concept of the "dual nature" of the British Labour Party: ‘‘The attachment of labels (bourgeois, reactionary, etc.) to the Labour Party tended to serve as a substitute for a real analysis. Of course, internally we can say what we like about the Labour Party, we can say it is a bourgeois party - but unless we say precisely in what sense it is bourgeois, the most disastrous political consequences will ensue." (22)

Although designating the NDP a bourgeois party is 'neat' and captures our historic opposition to its inadequacies as a class struggle vehicle, use of this label can deny its contradictions relative to both society as a whole and to the internal dynamics of the party itself. It risks missing the essence and judging the party by purely subjective criteria - by the criteria of the wishes and thoughts of the NDP leadership.

It is important to place the NDP and its petty bourgeois leadership in a context of contradictory development. In discussing the rise of consciousness. Plekhanov *(a giant of Russian Marxism, educator of the pre-WW 1 generation who however opposed the Bolsheviks in 1917 -ed.)* pointed out that the potential and dynamics of ideas are "explained not by the situation of the given class, taken in isolation, but by all the particular features of the relation between this class and its antagonist or antagonists. With the appearance of classes, contradiction becomes not only a motive force, but also a formative principle." (7)

The inability to understand contradiction leads to one- sided and false formulations and conclusions. The NDP must be examined not only in terms of the central contradiction between capital and labor, but also relative to the conjunctural relations between and in these two classes - at any given time - in all their complexity. What we are concerned with as intervening revolutionists is not only the NDP's final location but its present motion and dynamic.

The predominant feature of the NDP is that it poses independent labor political action to the working masses of Canada at this time. That it takes on this critical role underscores a longstanding problem of revolutionists in the Anglo-American world, facing as they do the relatively underdeveloped consciousness of their working classes. This is a reality that cannot be ignored or wished away - we are still taking the first steps.

NOT A NEW PROBLEM

The founders of Marxism confronted this problem many times and insisted on the absolute necessity of independent labor political action. Engels wrote: "The first step which must be taken in any country newly entering into the movement is to organize the workers into an independent political party, no matter how, providing it is a genuine workers' party."

(5) On numerous occasions Marx and Engels directed their anger at sectarian socialists who did not see the centrality of this first gigantic step. Marx was enthusiastic over the electoral support given to Henry George by the New York workers in the 1880's, despite the manifest idiocy of George's views from Marx's viewpoint. He did not Judge this development in terms of the bourgeois or petty bourgeois politics of George but rather in terms of the movement of the class.

Underscoring the importance of class political consciousness, Engels wrote in December of 1886: "A million or two of working men's votes next November for a bona fide working man's party is worth infinitely more at present than a hundred thousand votes for a doctrinairly perfect platform." (10)

Similarly, Marx greeted the first, preliminary, efforts of the British workers to organize independently on the political field, even though this was narrowly expressed by candidates who stood for the defence of only certain sections of the working class at that time – garment workers' candidates and coal workers' candidates, etc.

Lenin argued for the admission of the British Labour Party to the congresses of the Second International *(the then still revolutionary 2nd International of the Lenin cadre -ed.* "because it represents the first step on the part of the really proletarian organizations of Britain towards a conscious class policy and toward a **socialist** workers' party."

He attacked those who opposed seating the British Labour Party for taking a sectarian position and for ". .. .turning Marxism into a 'dogma', whereas it should be a 'guide to action'. When there exist objective conditions which retard the growth of the political consciousness and class independence of the proletarian masses, one must be able patiently and steadfastly to work hand in hand with them, making no concessions in principles but not refraining from activity right in the **midst** of the proletarian masses. These lessons of Engels have been corroborated by the subsequent development of events, when the British trade unions, insular, aristocratic, **philistinely** selfish, and hostile to socialism, which have produced a number of outright traitors to the working class, who have sold themselves to the bourgeoisie for ministerial posts.... have nevertheless begun **moving towards** socialism, awkwardly,

inconsistently, in zigzag fashion, but still moving towards socialism." (3)

Trotsky continued this tradition in his discussion of three types of development of workers' political action. The question took on new dimensions with the degeneration of the Communist Parties. In Great Britain, the U.S. and the *(British Commonwealth)* Dominions, he found the situation markedly different from the European countries. In Britain, it was the unions, after considerable experience and in the face of their nation state's declining economic fortunes, that turned to the formation of the Labour Party. This generalized their needs for political action organized against the bourgeoisie.

NDP A DETOUR ?

It is interesting to note that all these thinkers, discussing many different types of this development, never refer to any of them as a "detour." In this they hew to the Marxist rejection of subjective characterizations in critical analysis. To them the class struggle has no map whose schema places labor parties off some predestined road of history. Revolutionists who use this term to describe the NDP are revealing schematic formalism and subjectivism both symptomatic of a sectarian methodology.

Lenin was fond of saying "The revolution is not like the Nevsky Prospekt" (not like Main Street). In his discussion of contradiction Plekhanov wrote "the path along which it forces mankind to move is not at all a straight line.... But, in mechanics too, cases are known when what is lost in distance is gained in speed.... Contradiction appears where and only where there is movement, and where there is movement thought goes forward, even though by roundabout ways." (8)

It is in this context that the labor party represents a giant step forward from simple trade unionism. Measured in terms of the totality of Canadian society, the NDP represents that step – the development of independent labor political action. The critical measurement of this development (or process) cannot be based on the ideas of its leadership nor can it be based on its numbers. Only a minority of the trade unions are affiliated to the NDP and it receives only a minority share of the working class vote. At this time, it is the expression of only the more advanced workers and their allies. Yet because of its attachments to union locals, and through its riding associations, the NDP is structured so that much of the emerging consciousness and its energies are focused in on it. The NDP's significance as a labor party is found in the way it projects independent labor politics. It is a giant step forward relative to voting for either the Liberals or the Tories – or abstention from politics. As Trotsky argued in the case of Britain; "The Labour Party, in its upper ranks, is politically very close to the Liberals, but it is incapable of restoring to English parliamentarism its former stability; for the party itself, in its present form, is merely a provisional stage in the revolutionary development of the working class. MacDonald's *(the BLP's)* leadership is not more secure than Lloyd George's." (13)

To see a picture that underscores the importance of the NDP one has but to

look south of the border *(to the USA).* There we see the youth radicalization still flirting with the bourgeois parties. We see this radicalization shorn of its perspective by having little or no sense of the working class as the motive force of social change. And we see a working class with no means of political expression – for all the liberal bourgeois and social democratic currents which abound in the U.S.

POLITICAL ACTION IS NOT A NEW IDEA

The Canadian labor movement has been conscious of the need to have its own political arm for some time. The need to break from the simple trade unionism practised in the United States was being voiced as for back as 1903. In the December 5th *Toronto Star* of that year, the weekly trade union report makes interesting reading: "The trade union weapons, the strike and the boycott, will be powerless against the forces which are now operating to undo all that the unions have accomplished.

"While the American union leaders, it is charged, are fretting away their time and energy in the pursuit of non- essentials, belittling adverse rulings, and affecting to believe that the pendulum will soon swing to the other side, the Britlsh see the issue more clearly, and they have concluded the courts are destined to give them more rather than less trouble.

> "The British workingman, knowing the courts will continue to be used to his discomfiture, has determined – and it is as natural as that night should follow day, that he should so conclude – that he must wield some more formidable weapon; therefore he has made up his mind to go into politics and influence the legislature."
>
> This was a report of a speech given to a meeting called to nominate a Board of Control slate of a class character against the bourgeois candidates, even though the latter had labor endorsation. The article ends up; "Mr. Prescott concludes that what is happening in England today is but a forecast of what will be happening here tomorrow."
>
> Mr. Prescott's tomorrow is now here. The Canadian working class has followed the British example, but some radicals can't recognize a labor party when they see one.

(Ed. note: SOME ''WAFFLE'' ERRORS: *Waffle: a large left-nationalist tendency which developed rapidly inside the NDP in late 1969, gaining substantial support and directly challenging the leadership before being expelled three years later -ed.)*

There is an assertion, common around some Waffle circles, that the NDP is an objectively imperialist party – the leftwing and third party of U.S. Imperialism. This charge does not stem from any criticism of the fact that the NDP lacks a class struggle approach to international politics. Rather, the

argument hinges on the structural relation of the NDP to the international trade union movement. This argument has a wide appeal on the left because of the disgusting record of the U.S. trade union brass on issues ranging from race to foreign policy. It is glaringly apparent that these bureaucrats, who dominate the internationals, are integrated allies of American imperialism.

This fallacy about the NDP is untenable however. The domination by the brass which characterizes the international **union** movement is **not carried over** into domination of political action in Canada. This is a fact. Where the US bureaucrats' political concepts hold sway in some of the more conservative Canadian union locals, they do not support the NDP. Leading supporters of the NDP are independent Canadian unions like CBRT *(the then Canadian rail industrial union, now merged -ed.)* and CUPE *(the largest public service union).* The affiliation of international unions to the NDP takes place at the level of the local unions and shops. Where the organization as a whole took a position *(as)* in Steel *(USWA, the international United Steelworkers of America),* the action was taken in defiance of the U.S. brass. Support of the NDP is one of the more important breaks from the pattern of U.S. unionism.

As well as misreading the NDP's structural relationship to the trade union apparatus, many Wafflers give undue weight to this question as a criterion for categorizing the NDP. Its status as a labor party is much more profound than can be determined from its endorsement by what is only a minority of the Canadian trade union movement.

Integration does take place at the level of the Canadian union and NDP leaderships, but more decisive since affiliation takes place on the local level, in moving in the direction of the NDP, the union leadership is responding to the consciousness of the more advanced workers. The false emphasis given to the question of structural integration also tends to dismiss the riding associations. The majority of these also voted against the Waffle at Orillia. We must make the point that, in blaming their defeat on the Unions, the Waffle leadership fell heir to some distasteful anti-union prejudices of the old CCF.

The usual corollary to the mistaken position we have been discussing, is the thesis that the rise of national unionism will destroy the NDP – that it will throw the labor rank and file into bitter conflict with the NDP under Waffle tutelage.

In fact, it may well be CBRT and CUPE, two active NDP supporters who lead the exit in favor of a Canadian trade union center. The B.C. Federation of Labor, another strong NDP supporter, has also called for complete autonomy. It is ridiculous to assume *(federal NDP leader)* Lewis and Co.'s blind support of the Internationals in the face of all these pressures. The

NDP brass needs the support of the unions and, if they sniff a powerful sentiment, we can be sure that they will remain either neutral or support the Nationals. Of such stuff is opportunism made - so, also is superficial and primitive analysis exposed.

For revolutionists it would be foolhardy to identify a break with the Internationals, even though an expression of the radicalization, as a principled break from reformism. A Canadian trade union center is not *ipso facto* a revolutionary trade union center. Some wishful Wafflers make this false elision. Such a profound shift requires much more. The events that would lie at the roots of such a crisis of leadership in the class are not yet upon us - nor do they loom in the near future. If the coal strike in Britain did not serve to significantly weaken the allegiance of the workers to Labourism *(the BLP leaders failing to support them -ed.)* one can hardly expect more from the less sophisticated working class of Canada.

IS THE NDP A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

We must examine the usefulness of designating the NDP a Social Democratic party. This is crucial to any evaluation of its ideological significance. The NDP's primary character does not derive from its social democratic features. In fact, not even a significant layer of the leadership is social democratic in the classical sense of repudiating certain key Marxist beliefs while attempting to remain in a Marxian tradition. Their ideology is too primitive for Kautsky or Bernstein *(two giants of German Marxism before WW 1, who nevertheless supported that war and opposed the Bolsheviks in 1917 -ed).* They *(the NDP leadership)* have never even dealt with, let alone repudiated, Marx. Saintly socialists like Salem Bland and J.S. Woodsworth have been enough for them. Their reformism is liberal and opportunist rather than hardened and social democratic.

Those who designate the NDP as Social Democratic usually have a profound overestimation of the consciousness of the class. They usually argue that the NDP is tolerated by the bourgeoisie due to its supposed function of disseminating reformism to the workers. The facts are contrary.

It is inaccurate to see the NDP, or its leadership, as prime purveyors of reformism. The proletariat is sufficiently weak and the bourgeoisie sufficiently strong that no conveyor belt is required. It is disseminated directly through their educational system and mass media without any reliance on social democratic translators or priests. It is in precisely this context, of the relative backwardness of the class, that the NDP represents a step forward.

Reflecting the illusions as well as the aspirations of advancing workers, the NDP has not yet betrayed the consciousness of the class it represents. In fact,

it has not yet even confronted it in any hard or sustained way on any issue. The NDP, after all, was not born as the result of a showdown or parting of the ways in the working class movement – it was not a backward step. It was born out of the weakness of the trade unions in facing the Canadian state, and the inability of the declining and more farmer oriented CCF to defend them – even though they had endorsed it.

It is only recently that the Ontario NDP leadership has begun to try to define itself with any consciousness at all. With the fall '73 ten part series on Liberty and Equality they hoped to define the NDP relative to both "liberal capitalism" and "the undemocratic left." The attendance, averaging 35 per session tends to discount the value of ascribing a social democratic essence to the NDP and its membership.

Des Morton, an initiator of the course, saw the **lack** of any srongly entrenched social democratic ideology as one of the big problems. He described the Waffle as reflecting a deep seated crisis rooted in the rapid memberhsip growth of the '60s. This growth, he maintained, had eroded the Fabian and social democratic heritage of the CCF and had allowed the Waffle to run wild in what he called "an intellectual fridge."

Only a small minority of the NDP leadership has even a CCF background. This "social democratic" course, based on the ideas of John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty," is the best this leadership could offer after ten years of pragmatism, in an attempt to entrench itself as priests of historic social democracy. Their most earnest try at taking on the cloak of social democracy turned out to be a peek-a-boo revelation of naked liberal reformism.

WHAT KIND OF ORIENTATION ?

(PART TWO)

Once we have decided that in essence the NDP is a labor party we must decide our orientation to it. The first step is to decide if our orientation is strategic or only calls for tactical adaptations.

A strategic orientation involves a number of questions. If the NDP is a labor party then logically it will be the arena in which many of the contests for the leadership of the class will take place. If the central contradiction in the party is between its working class base and the petty bougeois leadership and program, it would be folly for revolutionists to abstain from the long term struggle to affect the synthesis of that contradiction. These views demand a stregic orientation which flows from the realization of objective processes. This is geared to the resolution of the major crisis of our epoch – the crisis of leadership.

Though revolutionists may win strong influence in limited sectoral battles in community, student, local union, and many other situations, the political struggle for the leadership of the class takes place in the NDP - this establishes the framework, not the boundaries, of the battle. This does not imply a struggle for the leadership of the NDP. It is a struggle for the leadership of the class - to win it away from the program, leadership, and organizational method of the NDP. In all these things, revolutionary Marxists know the bankruptcy of a simple labor party formation. The sectoral battles train precious cadres. The contest for the political leadership of the class alone builds the mass revolutionary party. Our orientation must place us in a proper strategic relationship to our necessities.

Involved is an understanding of where we are at. Building a revolutionary vanguard party is not a matter of declaration but of dialectics. We do not as yet possess a viable leadership relationship to the masses. We are a cadre gathering propaganda group. Our forces are still too small to credibly address the masses directly in our own name - except in rare cases. We seek out these opportunities, but we seek them realistically. We avoid substitutionism. We speak to the advanced workers through our support of, and our participation in, the NDP. That is to say, a strategic orientation defines both the arena and the role we are able to play at this conjuncture.

A tactical approach is the opposite of this and flows out of a different orientation - a different evaluation of both the possibilities and the necessities. All political groups (left and right) in Canada must have some tactical approach to the NDP, Intervention in the class struggle requires frequent tactical approaches to many organizations where there is ferment. Examples would be working with Catholic organizations in the grape boycott, and the United Church on the issues of Chile and South Africa. These are generally short range single (and specific) issue encounters.

> Though there may be many superficial similarities in practice flowing from the two concepts, to reduce an orientation to the NDP to a tactical one is to place it on the level of a special events concept. This denies the weight and significance of the NDP and falsely lumps it as just another sectoral area. The centrality of the NDP is denied by depicting our relationship to it in the paltry limits of the normal Leninist use of the word tactic.

This notion is based on a misreading of the possibilities open to revolutionists. Tactical support is like deciding to take the TTC *(Toronto transit)* when one has no other transport. So a tactic is adopted of taking a bus whenever one happens along - jumping on and off to avoid paying the fare. It leads to a

credibility gap between us and the advanced workers and mis-educates our cadres as to the realities and the value of the class vehicle.

WHAT DOES "UNCONDITIONAL" MEAN?

Recognizing that a correct orientation to the NDP poses the question of strategy, we must decide whether our support has any conditions on it for the strategic period. The term "unconditional support" grates badly on a lot of peoples' ears because they tend to equate it with undying faith or unconditional surrender, or some similar notion. We agree with Gus Horowitz, a leader of the U.S. Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, who uses the term to describe his party's relationship to the nationalist movement of the oppressed. He defines it as meaning that the SWP will support them regardless of their leaderships or program.

> "Revolutionary socialists give unconditional support to the national liberation struggle of the Palestinian peoples against Israel and imperialism; that is, support regardless of agreement or disagreement with the political line being put forward by the leadership of the movement at the given time." (23)

This definition is appropriate to our strategic orientation. In fact, no other position is tenable for mass oriented revolutionary politics in Canada today. What would "conditional" support be? What if conditions are or are not met? This would be a position of dependency - skipping through the hoop of the NDP to the crack of the whip of the parliamentary caucus. Contrary to any idea of genuflecting before the altar of Social Democracy, unconditional support is the only position of independence. It is the only position independent of the leadership. This is not support for what the NDP **does** at any given instance, it is support for what it **is** in this whole period.

THE TROTSKYIST TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM

> The transitional program is a series of democratic and transitional, struggle-focusing and consciousness raising, demands. The application of this program is inconceivable except in the real processes of the class struggle. These demands take on their historic role only in fusion with the political and economic struggles of the class itself - in its battles, through its organs. This does not deny building the revolutionary vanguard party - it makes it possible.

It is impossible to implement the transitional program in Canada today without

unconditional support to the NDP. The transitional program is not merely a set of demands, not merely a tool kit; it is the struggle for leadership of the class. Those who do not orient correctly to the NDP cannot participate in that process, This is revealed most sharply by those who have a position of unconditional opposition to the NDP. We can see the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist- Leninist) *(Maoist --Ed.)* circulating its petitions endorsing socialist revolution on the streets. We have seen the Canadian Party of Labor *(again, Maoist --Ed.)* reduce itself to an economist sect which apes habits drawn from their false middle class stereotype of what the workers are. We have watched SUPA (Student Union for Peace Action), and class collaborationist "Community Organizers'' doing their war dances around the gut issues of garbage collection and playgrounds.

Trotsky saw the interconnection between the labor party and the transitional program, even "a very opportunistic labor party." In a discussion about the labor party question In the United States he said; "That our young comrades separate the transitional program from the labor party is understandable because the transitional program is an international question, but for the United States they are connected - both questions - and I believe that some of our comrades accept the transitional program without good understanding of its meaning, for otherwise the formal separation of it would lose for them all importance." (11)

Attempts to bypass the consciousness of the class lead to either capitulation to its backwardness, or utter frustration. These pressures operate on those who have only a position of critical support. It leads to a persistent challenge of the NDP itself, a challenge which the vanguard is not in a position to fulfill. Otherwise we would not be in the NDP in the first place. This posture is satisfyingly heroic but politically incredible. 'We are reminded of an anecdote - (question) What is the definition of a hero? (answer) A flea taking a Kung Fu stance in front of an elephant!

Such challenges tend to depoliticize the contestation. An example of this was the first (and last) newsletter of the now defunct left caucus of the Ontario NDP published in 1973 *(reflecting the new LSA leadership's revised orientation -ed.)* This was written in the framework of a tactic of critical support. Critical support led the newsletter to spend all its space attacking and analyzing the leadership rather than explaining democratic and transitional demands. This turned the brunt of their attack onto the NDP itself rather than separating the rank and file from the brass on real issues. This tactic subordinated the real political differences which should be focused, and forced the question of an organizational alternative into false prominence.

Another symptom of the insidious sectarian disease that thrives on the tactic of critical support, is the compulsion to always raise one's fundamental criticism of the NDP with the gay abandon of someone throwing pearls before swine. One of many examples is the September 24/73 issue of **Labor Challenge**. In a centerspread explaining why editor George Addison was expelled from the NDP, Dick F. 'trots' out fundamental criticism to center stage. He states that the NDP has "no" program for the class Struggle - not an inadequate program mind you! There is no passionate defence of the right of socialists to affect this program. In fact the article practically brags that the differences under discussion are only hints of the big reasons to oppose the NDP as a whole. Dick F. had abandoned the method of the Transitional program and our orientation for a tactic of critical support in response to the pressure to show that the LSA was as left as the RMG *(Revolutionary Marxist Group, an ultraleft Trotskyist tendency gaining influence in the LSA at this time -ed.)* As Engels once put it: "What childish innocence it is to present one's own impatience as a theoretically convincing argument.'' (20)

Such positions miss the real polarizations that will produce militants receptive to revolutionary politics. For the bourgeoisie the NDP represents class politics. For the working class as a whole the NDP represents class politics. If revolutionary socialists don't know what the NDP represents they end up criticizing the bourgeoisie for false consciousness - as *Labor Challenge* did in last year's Manitoba election coverage. It put itself in the position of saying that the bourgeois organizations were needlessly hysterical and basically incorrect. It found some local small town businessman to quote because he saw the NDP as "no threat". Misreading the real class struggle, and posing no practical alternatives, this kind of critical support poses abstentionism to any conscious worker.

False opposition to the NDP also paralyzes sectoral work. Failing encouragement to the women's or the student's movements to orient to the NDP, what way is there to popularize the concept of class politics? We are left with abstract and spontaneist concepts of mass actions - exactly where and how is left to ingenuity.

WHAT KIND OF CRITICISM?

For revolutionary socialists, criticism of the inadequacies of the NDP is axiomatic; it is part of the struggle to build the revolutionary party. But it is important to define the nature and the mode of that criticism to control its effect. In many instances the stance of support and of criticism are organically

tied together. Lenin makes this clear in his polemic with the ultra-lefts. "And the mistake the 'Left' Communists are making is particularly dangerous at the present time precisely because certain revolutionaries are not displaying a sufficiently thoughtful, attentive, intelligent and calculating attitude…. (and unless they do, we stand the risk of being mere talkers) we must, firstly, help Henderson or Snowden to beat Lloyd George and Churchill (or to be more correct: to compel the former *(the British Labour Party leaders -ed.)* to beat the latter, because the former are afraid of their victory!); secondly, we must help the majority of the working class to convince themselves by their own experience that we are right...."(2)

The same realities that bring us to a position of unconditional support guide us in the effectiveness of our criticism. Once we assimilate the reasons for this position we realize that it does disservice to our tasks to raise apocalyptic criticism to the level of the primary purpose of the intervention. For criticism to take effect the critic must establish credibility. Non-sectarian revolutionists do this by the struggle for concrete democratic and transitional demands.

Our criticism has to recognize the relations between the leadership and the rank and file. It is important to know that *(federal NDP leader)* Lewis is not just a reformist and that simple designation is not enough to predict all his actions. There are also left reformists. Lewis is a thoroughly opportunist reformist who is guided by what the electorate wants or will buy. Without falling prey to opportunism ourselves, it is incumbent on us to do our work with the same and better awareness than he has - criticism must be relevant within the framework of that insight. No Menshevik theory of stages is involved, we are certainly not waiting for all the workers to support the NDP before we criticize it. We must however insist that consciousness develops as a process and we must direct our propaganda **to** it, and not simply **at** it.

There are pedagogical questions involved in the nature of criticism which are lost to sectarians. Their blindness to these questions is often among the first symptoms of their political disease. Revolutionists who would truly enter the class struggle must examine and learn the dynamics of criticism as a method of propaganda.

In relation to the concrete and felt needs of the class, its potency is in direct proportion to how it is presented in a framework of concrete and practical alternatives that the class can grasp as practical. In this the struggle for transitional and democratic demands presents many opportunities for critical analysis as the obstacles pose themselves in the experiences of the struggle itself.

The consciousness raising power of criticism in this framework is great. The

positive and constructive nature of criticism directed to the accomplishment of understandable able goals makes it extremely effective.

Criticism can also be a useful first step in unifying the already disenchanted and disaffected by spelling out their opposition to the status quo - but it is not a mobilizer, as many factionalists have discovered when they have finally won the freedom to go about the serious job of building their own organizations. Only concrete alternatives, viable and practical alternatives can accomplish this task. This is not the place for a full examination of this important subject, but before leaving it we must note that criticism has a different scope in the realm of theory than in day-to-day politics. In theoretical polemic criticism of ideas by the logical extension of their inherent contradictions has more usefulness because of the size and sophistication of the milieu in which the discussion takes place. One of the earmarks of a sectarian is their inability to understand their audiences' level of understanding.

Coming out of the youth radicalization many comrades have come to revolutionary politics from petty bourgeois academia. Unlike the cadres of a proletarian group that is organically part of the class, they suffer from a debilitating tendency to Testamentary politics. They have a petty bourgeois attraction to the power of revelation - this is both self-justifying and self-defeating. One elision that is common to their thinking goes like this: To lead is to foresee. To lead is to forewarn as militantly as possible. (For surely the clever shall inherit the earth.)

* * *

The debate here has been involved but it is not a simple quibble over terms or nuances of meaning. Certain formulations come together to spell out their own logical connection. The NDP as a bourgeois party, a tactical orientation, critical support - these link up to spell out sectarianism. Labor party, unconditional support, strategic orientation, are also tied together - they spell out effective revolutionary intervention.

LONG-RANGE FRACTION WORK

As we noted earlier Canadian Trotskylsts have developed certain formulations and slogans that summarize and focus their intervention in the Labor party. We shall now return to an examination of these. First we will consider "Long range fraction work with a non-split perspective" *(into both the CCF and the NDP - Web Ed.)* This construct is the result of many lessons and experiences.

In the late 40's and early 50's the world Trotskyist movement turned to the existent mass workers parties, both Communist and Social Democratic, with the view of making what was described as "entry *sui generis*" (of a special type). Our tiny forces, faced with *(the problem of)* atomic destruction and the growing conservatism of the masses, practiced liquidationism in many countries. Under the leadership of Michel Pablo many comrades did not see any alternative to deep entry and underground faction work - the pressure to adaptationism overwhelmed many. Their concept *(of abandoning any independent public existence -- Ed.)* challenged the very need for the revolutionary party by denying the possibility of constructing it. We in Canada rejected this analysis and defeated their Tendency in our ranks.

We had just come through an earlier struggle against sectarian "purity" and subjectivism. We had come through a long and searching debate to establish the reality of our tasks and perspectives. We were a tiny propaganda group with a correct program and analysis and the aim of building a revolutionary party. This could not be done by simply proclaiming the party and waiting for the class to catch up. The sterility of this kind of idealism was obvious. We had to gather cadres to make that future party a possible reality. We had to go to the class at its own level in its own existing organizations. We had to make ourselves part of its experience.

These two struggles for clarity fused in our concept of long range fraction work with a non-split perspective. We rejected both the false concept of the independent party now and that of deep entry. We rejected both sectarian (optimistic) subjectivism, and liquidationist (pessimistic) subjectivism. As dialectical materialists and active revolutionists we turned to the task of building the cadres for our party in and around the CCF*(the farmer-labor based precursor to the NDP founded in 1935 -ed.).* To combat the pressures for adaptationism we kept a public face. We kept a headquarters and a book store though we had no public organization or press for several years. We started the slow process of recruiting to our program on an individual contact basis. We carried our transitional demands into the CCF and the unions. We trained our cadres in Trotskyism and the practice of democratic centralism to arm them for the building of the revolutionary party.

As a backhand compliment to the fact that we did not adapt or liquidate, in the early 1950's the Ontario CCF brass expelled fourteen of us. We raised our public profile a notch by forming the Socialist Educational League and commenced publication of the Workers Vanguard. Both were oriented to the CCF and presented as poles for socialist clarification and the consolidation of the left in the labor party. The CCF was still the focus of our politics even though it had shifted slightly as the center of our activity. We were not **opting**

for the sectarian course of confronting it as an opponent political party.

In the ensuing years our cadre gathering has been well served by our orientation. Without our public face we could not have met the tasks posed by the radicalization that developed outside the NDP. Without our deep involvement with the labor party we could not have recruited most of the comrades who lead the Trotskyist groups today. Many revolutionists tend to forget their own origins and personal political development. In losing this appreciation of their own development, their capacity for patient work in the real class struggle is weakened. The fact remains that the overwhelming majority of revolutionists in Canada come out of some experience with the NDP. It is sheer wishful thinking to expect that the mass of the workers will bypass this experience.

Our understanding of our tasks has meant that, at the same time as we maximize the advantages of our open face, we don't pose ourselves as enemies of the NDP. It serves no purpose to falsely pose the revolutionary party as an **actuality** for the present or the near future. We direct ourselves to the concrete tasks of the continuing struggle. We say join the NDP and join with the revolutionary socialists in their participation in struggles both inside and outside the labor party. We have avoided posing ourselves as a political party, alien to the labor party, bent on a series of smash and grab operations. The hold of the NDP over the class and the possibilities of revolutionary work in the NDP are too long term to move to a premature collision which will see **us**, rather than the reformist leadership, as the losers. In this context, the **non-split** perspective defines the **long term** struggle we face to overcome our isolation from the class and to really become an alternative, a revolutionary challenge, to the petty bourgeois leadership of our class. It does not define the **amount** of work to be carried on in the NDP - this varies with the conjuncture. The NDP is the focus of our mass oriented politics, but not always the center of our activities. Nor does it mechanically rule out our participation in left groupings that have split from or been driven out of the labor party.

To sum up, the NDP is the arena in which we contest for the leadership of the class. But it is not always the arena for all the struggles of the class. Various facets of the class struggle, and specific currents in the general radicalization, are reflected in struggles that are not contained by the NDP. In this, our refusal to make a deep entry is vindicated by our freedom to present ourselves to all the foci of the class struggle and the radicalization.

At this stage in our development **all our work is fraction work.** Since we are not yet a party it is not yet our direction to emphasize our independence and

enter all struggles under our own banners. The centrality of our NDP fraction work is underlined by our qualifying it with the phrase "non-split perspective". The formulation "long range fraction work with a non-split perspective," in other words, concretizes dialectically both our long term struggle for the leadership of the class through the NDP, and our intention to work independently with other elements that may come to the class struggle outside of its ranks. Even though such work may, for a whole period, center our activity outside the NDP, it is crucial that it does not build any artificial barriers between us and the focus of our politics.

Because we see the NDP as the main vehicle of rising class consciousness for the whole next period, with various components of the radicalization passing under its umbrella, we have a strategic orientation to the development of broad left wings in its ranks to challenge the liberal reformist and social democratic leadership. In these formations we put forward transitional and democratic demands which challenge the party to adopt a line to meet the needs of the class struggle and its mass base. We challenge the leadership to carry these real class struggle demands. Their unwillingness to do so sometimes means posing our own organizational alternative - but it is formalistic and sectarian to present ourselves in this way unless the political lessons justifying it have been assimilated.

THE EVOLUTION OF A TERM

To digress for a moment, we should note the term "our party" and the way it has evolved in its usage among Canadian Trotskyists. In our struggle with the comrades who were against our orientation to the CCF in the late 40's, we had many arguments defining this term. We clarified it to mean that, because we had a correct program, we possessed the **nucleus** of the future revolutionary party. In as much as we were the only embodiment of that program at that time we were justified in calling ourselves the nucleus of the future party among ourselves and our immediate contacts. The designation "embryo" of the future revolutionary party was also discussed. In the fact that our group practiced democratic centralism and had our program it was argued that we were a tiny version of what the party would be. This was generally rejected because it implied that our small group would grow lineally and thus that everything was then present, including the basic personnel. We said, on the contrary, that the party would be built by a process of splits and fusions, regroupment and reunifications of major proportions.

Given the proliferation of left groups in Canada in the last decade, including the proliferation of Trotskyist groups, and now the establishment of a whole

new centrist formation in Waffle, our understanding has proven to be prophetic. Yet many comrades of the LSA have slipped into the mystifying designation of their league as "The Party."

One is reminded of a primary school joke. (Question) What is the height of arrogance? (Answer) An ant climbing up an elephant's leg with intentions of rape. With their self delusions about their real place in the struggle to build the revolutionary party some comrades have placed themselves high up the elephant's leg indeed. They are only a tail's twitch away from having their illusions completely shattered.

WIN THE NDP TO SOCIALISM

For the vanguard elements in the NDP left we must put forward a slogan of struggle which will intensify their differences with the leadership without losing their base in the NDP. This is the essence of our transitional approach and the nexus of our definition of the vanguard. We do not see the vanguard defined simply by the ideas they have, as do some. We locate the vanguard by their role as actual leaders in the real class struggle. Otherwise one risks mistaking the **fringes** for the vanguard. These people must relate to where the class is **now** before they earn the designation vanguard. For this they need more than a fundamentalist view of the NDP - they need a Trotskyist understanding of how to work.

For our tasks in the NDP the best general slogan yet worked out, by many and painstaking tests, is "Win the NDP to socialism." This abbreviates our general slogan "For a Class Struggle Program and a Socialist Perspective." For a variety of reasons the abbreviation is the most appropriate yet devised to tersely describe the necessities of our direction in the NDP.

The ONDP leadership has been engaged in polishing its repertoire of reformist terms in the *Ontario New Democrat*. "Win the NDP to Socialism" concretizes the opposite pole. For revolutionists it is the only slogan that begins to capture the size of our task. "Fight for Socialist Policies" leads to a mish-mash of disconnected fights over individual issues and policies. What if some of these are conceded? What if, as in the Saskatchewan convention, a great majority of them are adopted? Are our tasks then fulfilled? The art of revolutionary politics is not only to advance, but also to consolidate. Each gain must broaden the perspective of those who fought for it for this consolidation to take place.

Another popular alternative, "Win NDPers to Socialism", breaks with the transitional method in placing the onus on the personal and intellectual development of the membership instead of focusing the struggle for a correct

program against the leadership. We might try "Win the NDP to the Transitional Program – Or as Much of it as Possible", but this hardly expresses the enthusiasm necessary to the task. None of these other formulations come to grips with the real problems.

Are we "lying to the masses" when we put forward this slogan of struggle which is practically impossible to realize? Remember, it is not **totally** excluded that the rank and file of the unions and the party can break through together and, if our cadres are prepared and large enough, some major conjunctural struggle could transform the NDP and wipe out the majority of its organization in favor of the mass revolutionary party. But this is not what sustains the correctness of the slogan. If we adopted the methodology of those who think this is lying it would have an interesting effect on our student work where, in the context of a 'red university' strategy, we call for a women's liberation university, for student-staff control. It would have curious effects on our policy of running in bourgeois elections on a platform of key democratic and transitional demands. This argument demonstrates a logic devoid of the dialectic.

The kind of dogmatic and formalistic thinking that this expresses leads away from any understanding of both social classes and history. The quickest way to expose it is by posing the kind of questions it either cannot answer, or answers wrongly. Those who think that the slogan in question is a lie should tell us – is it the same kind of lie to say win the NDP to socialism as it would be to say win the Liberals to socialism? We must ask these thinkers, do you see that the NDP is a labor party while the Liberals are a bourgeois party? Does our slogan have to address itself to the workers in the NDP who are struggling with the problems of the kind of program and leadership that they need? Do you recognize that they will learn the inadequacies of the NDP only by their own experience and not by unrequested school lessons?

And more – do you accept the concept that a left wing should present itself in a defensive and popular way? Is there any difference between slogans and demands? How about between slogans and fundamental precepts? What is the difference between propaganda and agitation? The debate on these questions could be interesting and voluminous. But we agree with Trotsky about sectarians when he said, "Bolshevik Leninists, without waste of time, calmly leave these groups to their own fate". (12) With our slogan of "Win the NDP to Socialism" we are not telling militants anything except the direction they must move in and the focus of the struggle,

Nor is this slogan counterposed to building the revolutionary groups except in the minds of reductionists who are only happy when uttering ultimate truths. We are not engaged in strip mining off the cream of the NDP left to leave the

party barren. Our recruiting should not contradict the building of left caucuses – our strategy does not demand that we have hegemony over them at all times. We are working in a mine of contradictions which provides revolutionists with rich opportunities to test their politics and leadership in the mass arena. This is a responsibility as well as an exercise! We are very much accountable!

"Win the NDP to Socialism" is an attempt to formulate the overall -strategic Imperatives of the class. It is not the sole determinant of every conjunctural intervention. There were times in the Waffle's development that the posing of the Leninist vanguard organization was the only correct thing to do. The LSA's dogmatic application of "Win the NDP to Socialism" at that conjuncture was routinlst and abstracted from the real political problems that Wafflers were working out. There are many sides to sectarian mistakes. What image did we project to them by insisting that they remain in the NDP while **we** had a public face? Sheer arrogance! Without posing ourselves as a viable alternative, we were in effect arguing that they had no right to any perspective but to preserve a deep entry!

This formal and simplistic application of the slogan at the Hamilton conference spawned much of the unease about it today. Formalism breeds mistakes. History does not repeat itself but mistakes definitely tend to. In this case tragedy helps prepare the groundwork for disaster. The LSA, who posed as "unconditional supporters" and came through as uncritical, with no party profile at all, have now made a 180 degree overcompensation into confrontationism.

LABOR GOVERNMENTS AND METHODOLOGY (PART THREE)

The experience in many advanced capitalist countries indicates that their working classes stand to go through profound and intensive experiences with social democratic and labor governments in office. This triggers a dynamic process whereby, as Trotsky put it, "any reasonable, serious reforms by the Labour Government in the domain of taxation, nationalization, and true democratization of the administration would cause an immense outburst of enthusiasm on the part of the working masses, and since appetite increases with eating, successful moderate reforms would inevitably serve as a stimulus for more radical reforms." (15)

The process of the class breaking from reformist and parliamentary illusions is given impetus by this very appetite. Indeed this process will frequently accelerate while these governments are in power. To intervene and affect this process tests all of our analytical and political skills. Where such parties

represent independent labor political action we call for their election as an inherent part of our unconditional support for this principle. As Lenin pointed out in his polemic with the British ultra-lefts, the election of labor parties is the best means of providing the working class with the richest possible experience that tests their reformist illusions and their leaderships. A year of the NDP in power is worth a thousand forums on the limits of Swedish "Socialism". It is an experience that can bring forward the class as a whole. A review of the gains of working people under the NDP government in Manitoba, estimated by the *Toronto Daily Star* as to be worth $500 each a year, is sure to have an effect on the political consciousness and aspirations of Ontario workers.

Our task in this process is twofold. We must deepen the understanding of the class significance of an NDP victory, while exposing the limitations of the reformist leadership, To arm ourselves for this task we must come to grips with some basic questions. Foremost among these is the class character of the government. Is it a labor government or a bourgeois government? Some may think at times it is best described as some form of popular front phenomenon.

A number of interacting factors must be considered in this analysis. First is the distinction which Marxists have always made between the state and the government. This is worth dealing with at some length in order to avoid confusion.

Leninists have always polemicized against any illusion that a parliamentary victory could ever be the road to, or equivalent to, state power. Trotsky posed it succinctly; "The opportunist is always on his knees before the idol of the bourgeois state and consents to advance to his ideal only through the asses' gates constructed for him by the bourgeoisie. And these gates are so made that no one can get through them." (14) The difference between parliament and the state is at the heart of the differences between reformists and revolutionary socialists.

We know that the state as a whole remains in the control of the bourgeoisie despite the electoral victory of a labor party. We might characterize an NDP government as a captive of the bourgeois state, thus forced to take public responsibility for that state in as much as it does not struggle against it. The record of reformist governments shows that some laws might be changed but the judiciary remains. The civil service remains essentially intact, as does the wide repressive apparatus. This is not altered by the added amount of the economy brought under 'public control,' as this is not done by socialization under workers' control, but by nationalization. The essential reins of power remain outside the legislature. There is not much room for argument about this within the Marxist movement.

Moreover, this division between government and state has widened as a corollary of the extension of bourgeois democracy and universal suffrage (see Mandel's pamphlet on the state) (6). The history of the 20th century is the history of the growing autonomy of the state apparatus from parliament. This is especially so in Canada where the smoke screen of Federal-provincial constitutional bargaining has obscured what is virtually the entire transference of economic policy to a state apparatus which is almost directly integrated with the top echelon personnel of the bourgeoisie.

Normally relations between state and government are harmonious. In fact at the cabinet level Ministers and Deputy Ministers are frequently interchanged. Elected cabinet ministers and civil service deputies fill each other's shoes quite nicely. But when the harmony is disrupted it is clear that it is not parliament that rules the state. As the war between top civil servants and Diefenbaker demonstrated, even brother servants of capital have limited leashes as long as their power is restricted to parliament.

> The subservience of parliament to the state, and its lack of real power, is an essential part of the Communist strategy of smashing the bourgeois state. But this cannot be extrapolated in a mechanical way. For instance, we know that a fascist state is only a particular form of bourgeois state. But in it's particularity lies a whole different set of political problems than those that confront us in dealing with bourgeois democracy. The loss of working class rights under fascism demonstrates that bourgeois democracy is more than solely an ideological rampart for the bourgeois state. Parliamentary government is also a concession to the workers.

It serves to mystify bourgeois rule, but it also contains its antithesis in that it encourages the democratic and egalitarian aspirations of the masses. Parliament is both a facade and a forum, a rampart of bourgeois rule and a laboratory to test the illusions of the masses. Given the political consciousness of the Canadian working class, parliament is still the arena for major political struggles that will play their part in unifying and raising our class for its emancipation.

Workers will learn by their own experience that their political struggles must transcend parliament. But when they enter political struggle, through what they believe to be their own party, we must solidarize with them. The key determinant in this period is the fact that they have entered independent political struggle. To quote Lenin; "What do we mean when we say that the struggle of the working class is a political struggle? We mean that the workers cannot wage the struggle for their emancipation without striving to influence the affairs of state, to influence the administration of the state, the passing of

laws." (4)

Even for the bourgeoisie it matters who is in government. The two party system Is not just a public relations fraud. There are conflicts between the needs of the different strata of the bourgeoisie and these must be ameliorated and mediated. One avenue to the decision making apparatuses of the bourgeois state is through the government. While there is no difference for the workers which capitalist party wins an election, different sections of the capitalist class have their favorites.

There are good reasons why labor parties, for all the time-honoured reformism of their leaderships, are never the favorites of the bourgeoisie. An NDP victory takes an important tentacle of the state apparatus out of their direct control. They understand the important distinction between reforms instituted by their own parties and those of a labor party – no matter how inadequate they **both** may be. Says Trotsky; "The half truths of the Conservatives have the quality of Machiavellianism; the half truths of the Labour Party are the child of contemptible cowardice. The representation of the bourgeoisie resembles the tiger which hides its claws and cuddles amiably. The Labour leaders of the Thomas type are more like the beaten dog with his tail between his legs." (16)

The bourgeoisie understand that something profound happens with the election of labor parties."We shall no longer be dealing with the old fight between the Liberals and the Conservatives, the differences between them remaining in the 'family' of the possessing classes."(ibid.) (17) They do not like to see things go out of the hands of the family where other forces can influence the calling of the shot. The labor leaders may be 'beaten dogs' but they are accountable to the workers even while they are trapped in the parliamentary net of the state.

It is crucial that we too realize that something important happens with the election of a labor majority in parliament. It is an important consistency with our established call for the election of the labor party to describe such a government as a labor government, to support it, and to call for it to struggle against the state. From such a position we can join in and affect the experience of the class as the inadequacies of the parliamentary road are laid bare in the real political struggles. As we fight in the party and the mass movements for the implementation of the demands of the masses, whose aspirations are heightened by their conquest of parliament, we can quicken their understanding of the state as the fundamental instrument of bourgeois rule. As this political class understanding develops and deepens our program for the construction of the revolutionary party and the overthrow of that state becomes real and moves to center stage in the consciousness of the class.

The designation labor government rather than bourgeois government is both useful and logical. Where is the evidence of qualitative change that would suppose that an election of a labor party would transform it into a bourgeois government? How does the election of the labor party, **which we called for**, turn it into an instrument (rather than a victim) of bourgeois rule, one day after the workers have elected it? This is like saying that a trade union becomes transformed as an institution the moment a strike is over and it signs a contract; because it has agreed to adhere to and participate in the administration of that contract.

> The state is not a 'thing' in itself – apart from class and institutional relations. It is a series of related repressive, rationalizing and mystifying institutions. The complex and changing configurations of these relations, in bourgeois democracy, provide a large part of the environment in which the consciousness of the working class grows. Parliament is one of these institutions and, as the Chilean experience *(the military coup d'état against Allende – ed.)* dramatically reveals, it is both vulnerable to the repressive arm of the state and in potential conflict with the purposes which it was supposed to serve as an instrument of bourgeois rule.
>
> To designate an NDP government as bourgeois misconstructs the social and political contradictions that are actually involved. It misleads both ourselves and our periphery as to the political tasks of the conjuncture.

With the victory of a labor party the social contradiction is no longer between the ruling class as represented by the state/government versus the workers. It changes to be the workers and their elected representatives versus the state – a much more naked and politically sophisticating experience. The rising differences between the workers and their leaders, between the 'government' and the workers, becomes an internal political struggle in the workers' movement – this is a most promising situation for a vanguard group with its roots in the class.

A DIFFERENCE IN METHOD

We must stress another major feature of the debate on the nature of labor party governments – this is the difference between dialectical and historical materialism, and reductionist mechanical materialism. The proponents of the view that an elected NDP forms a bourgeois government are correct on their grounds – the grounds of formal categorical logic. The question is whether they are correct within the framework of Marxism. Is their analysis based on a

dialectical appreciation of the real empirical data? Marx once described Proudhon thus: "....as a philosopher with a magic formula in his pocket he imagines himself spared the necessity of going into.... details..." This and other limitations to Proudhon's horizons led Marx to say: "He aspires to be the synthesis and he is in fact nothing but a composite error. "(6) Plekhanov too had many occasions to combat dogmatic formalism. He noted that: "It was Hegel who said that any philosophy may be reduced to **empty formalism**, if one confines oneself to the simple repetition of its fundamental principles." (9)

Marxists, while rejecting simple empiricism and pragmatism, always attempt to apply their dialectical understanding to the concrete. As Lenin put it in *Left Wing Communism:* "The task is to apply the general and main principles of Communism to the peculiar relations between classes and parties, to the peculiar features in the objective development towards communism that are observed in every country and which should be studied, found and solved."

It is in this spirit that we refuse to call nationalism, capitalism, or labor parties intrinsically reactionary without situating them socially and historically – without measuring their essences by the criteria of the actual class struggle. By the standards of a 'grand scheme' of history, by an examination in the teleological framework of mechanical determinism, it is 'true' to say that all of these phenomena are bourgeois and/or reactionary. But Marxists reject any concept that this abstract 'truth' shall make you free.

We know that truth is concrete and must be constantly realized in the praxis – the coming together of theory and action. Categories are hard won and important tools in the arsenal of our method, but they are only a part of that method. Formal, simplistic, application of categories in conjunctural analysis transmutes doctrine into dogma. The political results are sectarian isolation and/or opportunistic and adventurist attempts to break out and get back into effect in the real world.

In politics we need to capture not only the apocalyptic essence of political phenomena, but also the internal contradictions and the direction of their synthesis. Ours can not be the method of rigid formalism. The method of "Yea, Yea, Nay, Nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil", as Engels described it. (18)

That is why it is not enough to examine any one facet of a phenomenon before we define it. While our historical understanding is decisive in the final analysis, it is metaphysical to see it as the only factor in conjunctural analysis. Our doctrine is part of a method, not a road map. Our categories, the

codification of our experience, are an aid to understanding the conjuncture - they are not an explanation of it. The topography of politics is much too fluid for road maps.

To the dialectical materialist there is no eclecticism involved in recognizing the reactionary character of nationalist ideology and at the same time placing no programmatic demands on nationalist movements of the oppressed as an *a priori* condition for our support. Nor do we raise the consciousness of the class to the position of reigning determinant - we reject the U.S. Democratic Party and the Parti Québécois despite the workers' identification with these parties. Nor is structural identification with the institutions of the working class decisive - in a prerevolutionary situation the apocalyptic 'objective' and conjunctural roles of a labor party tend to fuse and make it a bourgeois and reactionary force. Our method is concerned with dynamics - not statics. As Ernest Mandel put it: "The Marxist method is moreover inconceivable except as an **integration** of dialectical rationalism with empirical (and practical) grasping of the facts.'' (21)

The characterization of the NDP as a bourgeois party, or on NDP government as bourgeois, is correct however on an important level. It bespeaks our experience with such formations; that they will not adopt consistently anti-capitalist demands and revolutionary measures. Their perspective forces them to join, content or agonized, in some accommodation with the bourgeois state. It is important that this knowledge forearms us for participation in the struggle.

But this characterization fails to capture the processes involved and is thus inadequate and politically sterile. It fails to capture the party's and government's relations to the masses and their organizations, the significant legislative concessions, the attitudes and actions of the bourgeoisie, and the tension between the government and the state. It fails to capture and express the contradictory essence that is most germane to the political struggles of the conjuncture.

THE QUESTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Since the consciousness of the class plays a significant role in our analysis it must be analyzed also. Is the growing identification of the masses with the NDP a result of false consciousness or developing class consciousness? There are several measures to be used in answering this question.

One such is the NDP's legislative record. Legislative concessions, even when they do not transcend capitalism, are of no inconsiderable importance to the working class. We are not in the New Left habit of dismissing reforms as petty and 'animal' in their appeal to the 'commodity placated' working class. These concessions are important to the working class, its standard of living and its capacity to struggle, and they are extracted from the bourgeoisie against their inherent class interests. Any increase in the cost of the commodity labor exacerbates the crisis of the profit system.

The New Left developed from Gramsci a concept of a hegemonic ruling class that conspired against the workers by granting them huge concessions in order to more pleasantly exploit them. It is not in the scope of this work to make a detailed study of the fallacies of this naive reduction of the complexities of class, social, economic, and political relations. It is sufficient to say that these people confuse the resilience of capitalism with the will of the bourgeoisie.

At this conjuncture, while capitalism still has the flexibility to concede some reforms to the working class, these reforms can and are being legislated by NDP governments. The workers' identification with the NDP is deepened by their recognition of this reality. Another indicator of the fact that this rising identification with the NDP is not false consciousness is the social character of their government. This is defined by the access it grants to decision making by the opposing class. The access of the bourgeoisie to the bourgeois parties is both immediate and ultimate. It ranges from campaign contributions, to lobbies, to integration of the so-called ‘'conflicts of interest." Labor governments are not so generous to their individual constituencies and treat their opponents with undue fair play, but their concessions to the bourgeoisie are not built into their very existence and party apparatus. Their softness in the class struggle comes from their program – not their social base.

The bourgeoisie do not support their fund raising campaign dinners, nor do they sit on party policy committees. They relate to the labor party only across the bargaining table in the time honoured manner of trade union bargaining. Whatever spinelessness the NDP shows in its negotiating flows from its program – not from social necessity .The consciousness that the class possesses about the different character of such a government is a step forward in that it represents labor political action independent of the bourgeoisie and its parties.

Even the bourgeois press coverage can be examined for the role in which it

casts the NDP for its mass readership. The NDP government is constantly portrayed as a reluctant or compliant tool of the unions, the NDP party, or the pressure groups of the masses. In this the bourgeois press is more able to see reality than left sectarians.

Before leaving this question something should be said about our view that class consciousness will grow through and out of this NDP experience. In our knowledge of the fundamental (and ultimate) inability to carry the class struggle to its historically necessary conclusion that is inherent in reformism, we know that our class will be faced with betrayal by social democracy. The time comes when labor parties betray not only the objective and long term interests of the workers, but their political consciousness itself. We must work in the knowledge that, when this threshold is crossed, we must have built a viable alternative around our program. If we have built well, and promulgated our understanding correctly, such betrayals will become victories in the consciousness raising process. But that will be at a different conjuncture and the concrete political reality will be quite different from that of the present.

Simplistically defining NDP governments as bourgeois violates a number of principles of dialectics. It puts undue weight on the leadership's wishes to the detriment of understanding the party's dynamics and class base. It is based on a static analysis of the government's relation to the state and thus the economy as a whole. It gives no expression to the important differences of this government in relation to the developing mass movements. It stresses its capitulation to capitalism and obscures the concessions it gains for the workers. All of these one-sided judgments are a formalistic extrapolation of the historic knowledge of the vanguard rather than an objective evaluation of the conjuncture.

WHAT FLOWS FROM THESE ANALYSES ?

The definition of the class character of an NDP government is intimately related to the manner in which we would apply and present our transitional demands. If it were bourgeois *(if the NDP in power constitutes a bourgeois government, as some sectarians pedantically repeat -ed.)* we would frame our demands in the same way as we do for any other bourgeois government. We would aim to mobilize the masses against the government to expose the fundamental antagonisms between that government (and the state it serves) and the masses. Our propaganda would minimize any reforms won from such a government and stress the extra- parliamentary pressures that motivated them. We would be stressing that such reforms are consistent with capitalism rather than pointing to them as initial victories of the class in political action. We would advocate the complete independence of the institutions of the class

from the government, and these positions would make our 'support' to the NDP as a party inexplicable. *Labor Challenge,* over the whole last period *(up to mid-1973 --Ed.),* provides us with excellent examples of how this would be done.

If, on the other hand, an elected NDP forms a labor government, the product of a labor victory, the framework would be quite different. We would salute the reforms of their first initiatives and call on them to transcend these and deepen their legislative attacks on the miserable and exploitative profit system. We would call on them to extend medicare to dental care, to go beyond nationalized auto insurance to the whole insurance business, to nationalize not only the 'natural' monopolies but also the manufacturing that is based on them.

Our posture would be defensive. We would join in the struggle for the right of the party to control the government. We would call for the implementation of the party program by the parliamentary caucus and fight to establish that it was the party that won the mandate from the electorate, and not just the caucus. We would work to fuse the other individual struggles in the mass movement as a whole with the labor party and thus deepen the confrontation with the leadership. We would make capitalism the focus of our attack, show how it limits and sabotages the reforms of the NDP government, and explain to the party and the masses what must be done to solve this problem. We would do this by a series of transitional and democratic demands that would deepen the antagonism between the NDP and the state.

This does not mean accepting the bourgeois state apparatus and attempting to work through it. It is a strategy of exposing the class nature of that state by intensifying the conflicts between it and the labor government. It enlists the ranks of the party in the struggle against capitalism and the capitulationism of their own leadership without demanding, **as a precondition**, that they break from that leadership or their government at this juncture.

This strategy is not new. Trotskyists have practiced it in and around many NDP conventions, both provincial and federal. We have practiced it in and around provincial and federal elections. It is the strategy of unconditional and critical support. When the NDP has been elected this comes even more into its own, particularly in the subsequent elections when that government is seen as most accountable to the working masses.

A MINORITY FORCE IN PARLIAMENT

On the federal level, the most likely experience of the NDP in the foreseeable

future will be that of a minority force in parliament. With the NDP's parliamentary leadership on display before the whole class, we have enormous possibilities for propaganda and NDP directed agitation. We will have the chance to demonstrate the role of the NDP as the only defender of the masses' interests in parliament. It is the Liberals and Tories who are responsible for serving the exploiters. Every week gives us the opportunity to show, in a simple way, the manner in which class realities are reflected in parliament.

Within this context, we can definitely pose how, on key questions, the NDP fails to rise to the challenge. This does not mean criticising them for every error they make. It should be remembered in this regard that Lewis *(NDP leader in Ottawa)* is a sharp parliamentarian. Furthermore he packs two pistols. One for short range opportunist work and another for his longer range reformist objectives. By placing all the stress on his reformism we would mis-educate the real vanguard about the potential of the NDP leadership to move left under popular pressure, and thus we might aid in disarming them.

> Our biggest gains will be scored when the NDP betrays the consciousness of at least a significant minority of the class. These will not be scored by lying about the NDP record as have *Labor Challenge* and the *Old Mole (ultraleft journal)* in the case of the NDP and the rail strike (they charge the NDP with parliamentary strikebreaking). *(See comments on the LC coverage in "The Subversion of the revolutionary socialist orientation to the NDP," 1974 pp.42-47, on this website -- Ed.)* Nor will it be done with a scalpel, niggling away at every little nuance and shortcoming. The biggest faults are best exposed with an axe, and for that one must sometimes wait.

> To fail in this understanding is a capitulation to the cynicism of backward elements of the radicalization. It mis- educates the vanguard on the relation of the NDP to the class (as opportunist as well as reformist) and makes one the village idiot of the NDP constituency.

Labor Challenge treated the tactics of the last federal NDP caucus as coalitionism and class collaborationism. Due to a debate in the Fourth International on the phenomenon of popular frontism, there has been a growing tendency among some Trotskyists to stress the similarities and obscure the important differences between a popular front and a reformist labor party. A false identity is extrapolated from the fact that both political forms practice class conciliationism. The important difference that is obscured is that popular fronts are structured organizationally and politically to accommodate and collaborate with the bourgeoisie - labor parties are

structured organizationally and politically to struggle independent of, and against, the bourgeoisie. That their reformist, conciliationist leadership and program may lead to ultimate accommodation and collaboration, does not justify their immediate identity. To identify them blurs all distinctions necessary to clarify the path of intervention.

It is ironic that comrades who are promulgating this false identity of the NDP and the popular front cannot make a better reading of the bulletins of their co-thinkers in the world Trotskyist movement. Let us turn to the U.S. comrades' bulletin "United Front vs. Popular Front". On page four we find: "Healy's defence of the 'classical' form of the united front against 'revisionist' corruption is a prime expression of the tendency of infantile leftism to use the cover of 'Marxist nomenclature' to cloak a policy of abstention from the real struggle. Or, as Lenin put it: 'The surest way of discrediting and damaging a new political (and not only political) idea is to reduce it to absurdity on the plea of defending it.' This is precisely what Healy does to the idea of the united front." And this is precisely what LSAers are doing to our not so new NDP orientation by measuring it on their Procrustean bed of the popular front.

In this campaign against the NDP caucus' alleged coalitionism no attention has been paid to explaining how this is proven to be clearly coalitionism and not simply tactics based on a conciliationist adaptation to their limited grasp of the potentials. "The beaten dogs" are not very courageous after all.

RAMPANT REDUCTIONISM

Language and thinking are so interconnected that we can recognize weakness in the practice of one by inadequacies in the practice of the other. It has become too common practice to use the words conciliationism, coalitionism, and collaborationism as if they were interchangeable. Comrades skip from one to the other with little sense of any change in essential meaning. By this kind of simplistic reductionism Websters becomes an irrational jungle and communication is seriously crippled. Inability to verbalize the reflections of reality in their complexity indicates limitations on our ability to reflect on reality.

A key distinguishing feature of a popular front, pointed up by one draft political resolution to the recent world congress of the Fourth International, is their declared purpose of including bourgeois parties (or their shadowy surrogates) in the front. Some comrades blissfully conclude from this that popular frontism is categorized by its program. After this first simplistic and false reduction how easy it is to skip on to the next! Since we know that the NDP program is conciliationist, and leads toward class collaboration, the

parliamentary maneuvers of the NDP caucus are transmuted into coalitionism.

What next comrades? What happens to the call for the election of the NDP? Formalism and reductionism have brought us into a quandary. Surely we shall have to tidy things up and stop "....supporting **an electoral platform to advance class collaborationism.** A question of principle is involved, " (the political resolution cited).

But maybe we don't have to give up supporting the NDP completely. Perhaps we just have to make sure we don't call for workers to vote for them if they stand any chance of getting in or becoming the balance of power. The conclusion from this kind of nonsensical analysis can be summed up by paraphrasing a disreputable old adage - "All power corrupts, and **the illusion of power** corrupts absolutely!''

We cannot move on without affirming a few facts. These comrades not only misread the theory of the popular front, but *Labor Challenge* misconstrues the NDP's 'balance of power'. On every major class issue the NDP has been powerless. The Tories and Liberals voted together on the rail strike and the corporate tax issue without the slightest concern about the NDP's so-called power.

TOWARDS A LEFT WING

The possibilities for the construction of a broad left wing in the NDP vary according to the tempo of the class struggle, the unevenness of the radicalization, and the possibilities outside of the NDP. The deep-going ''Waffle'' left *(the large left-nationalist group in the NDP -ed.)* was built at a far more favorable conjuncture than the one we face now.

At the present, despite the exit of the ''Waffle'' and the inability of any sustained nation-wide left to emerge, it remains true that the NDP leadership is not able to satisfy a consistent and significant minority of the membership. And, just as struggles continue to come to and be reflected in the NDP, the prospects for a left remain ever alive. The ferment in the B.C. NDP is an indication of this.

The problem is to maintain the perspective of a broad left without succumbing to despair, of either ultra-left or reformist varieties, or issuing silly ultimatums to

the leadership or membership. An educational rather than a confrontational approach is called for. Failure to grasp this led *Labor Challenge* to headlines like "NDP Delegates Must Fight for Socialist Policies". This placed the onus on the membership and was coupled with strident attacks on the leadership which projected a totally unrealistic perspective for the immediate future. There continues to be openings for a broad left, but one of Shakespeare's characters might give us a good guide: "I can call the Gods from the deep seas,'' said the fool. "So can I, and so can any man" was the reply. ‘’But will they come?"

The task within left wings is to win them to basic democratic and transitional demands as an alternative to the program of the leadership. That is our strategic orientation as defined by the non-split perspective and the task of winning the ranks of the NDP from the leadership on a programmatic basis. It should be remembered that at this time most people outgrow rather than reject the NDP and its leadership's reformism. They come to the left because it offers more action and a better program.

The problem of independent left groups of some significance, but outside the NDP, has been with us since the youth radicalization. Our efforts to polemicize with the New Left on the importance of an NDP orientation were cut short by the ‘’Waffle’’ whirlwind which scattered our chances without its ranks assimilating our perspective.

Looking back it was not an illogical proposition that Trotskyists accompany such a group on its way out of the NDP without ourselves abandoning our orientation. Such a tactic was not excluded. In the case of the ‘’Waffle’’ this would not have been 'tailism’. It was a case of staying with the radicalization and not excommunicating ourselves for lessons they had not yet learned. It would not have been condoning their error, but rather understanding the real problems they faced, and being able to provide them with our discipline and vision for the long struggle ahead.

IN CONCLUSION

We will close with a few words on the call for "NDP to Power." On this question of a governmental slogan we agree with Pierre Frank *(Fourth International leader -ed.)* who, in his 1967 introduction to the Transitional Program, wrote: "A program without the perspective of a government of the working masses to carry out anti-capitalist measures, is not a transitional program." Furthermore, that slogan should be a "....transitional governmental formula corresponding to the organizational conditions and

consciousness of the masses at a given moment, and not.... a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Archimedes once proclaimed that, given a lever, a fulcrum, and a place to stand, he would move the world. Trotsky referred to the Leninist party as the lever of history. While that lever is only as yet a program and a concept promulgated by a handful of Trotskyists, there can be no greater crime than abandoning our transitional method of politics. This kills our only hope of obtaining our lever and finding our place to stand. Thirty-two years of application of this method to the Canadian class struggle are summed up in the NDP orientation as developed in the 1970 LSA document (24) and explained here.

This is how to build a group into a revolutionary party – in the full sense, the meaningful sense, of that word. This is the duty and the challenge in the struggle to build the Fourth International - in the full sense, the meaningful sense of that concept. We must all pledge ourselves to both tasks. Without the first, the second is an abstraction.

Toronto, June 15, 1974.

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